

# MECHANICAL MEMORIES MAGAZINE

ISSUE 64

MARCH 2012



*The only UK magazine for collectors and enthusiasts of  
vintage coin-operated amusement machines*

# Mechanical Memories Magazine

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# Editorial

Hello again, and welcome to the March magazine. Not much to report this month, although I should just like to mention the magazine binders that Brian King has generously offered to have produced. Since the February issue, the response has been quite good – in fact, knowing the time it takes for some of you to renew your subscriptions, I'd say it's been very good! However, we would like just a little more feedback before committing to anything, so do please get in touch with Brian ASAP.

And finally, assuming I don't have a nervous breakdown in the next couple of weeks, if you fancy a trip to Brighton sometime during the Easter school holidays, do pop in to see me at the arcade. I shall be open throughout the two weeks (unless the weather's really bad). Mechanical Memories is easy to find – we're at beach level about 100 yards west of the Palace pier. And if you can't make it over Easter, but are coming down for the Brighton Jukebox Show on the weekend of 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> April, try and make your way down after the show; it's always good to see you.

All the best

*Jerry*

# **Dreamland**

## MARGATE

### **Save Dreamland Update March 2011**

#### **Public Inquiry**

The Public Inquiry into Thanet District Council's decision to serve a Compulsory Purchase Order on the owners of Dreamland, Margate Town Centre Regeneration Company (MTCRC), resumed on the 6 March and ran to the 9 March, completing its fourth week. The Inquiry heard evidence from Thanet District Council's Planning Project Manager, Ashley Hills, and then from me. Ashley I were the final witnesses at the inquiry. The inquiry will end on 26 March when the barristers read their closing submissions.

12-year-old Gavin Kapuscinski asked to speak at the last inquiry session in February and found himself prominently featured in the local press. The Isle of Thanet Gazette reported that Richard Glover QC, the barrister for MTCRC, took the opportunity to cross-examine the school boy and suggested that he did not understand the proposals. Gavin explained that he had followed the inquiry online and seen MTCRC's plans for 474 homes at Dreamland.

#### **Dreamland and the Vintage Pinball Parlour at Geek**

We were absolutely delighted to be invited to appear, with the Vintage Pinball Parlour, at the inaugural Gaming Expo East Kent (GEEK) in February.

For five days the Winter Gardens in Margate was transformed into a retro gaming festival with over 2,000 visitors, from grandchildren to grandparents, playing games, competing, learning, breaking the Guinness Book of Records for the largest number of players in a PONG tournament and even a Nintendisco.

Now firmly on the cultural heritage tourism map, GEEK will return next year with even more on offer – so watch this space as they say. For more information about the expo visit [www.geek2012.co.uk](http://www.geek2012.co.uk).

## **Urgent Works Update**

Works generally are progressing well for the remaining work to the Dreamland Cinema building. Current areas of investigation and remedial work are the 'concrete window' to the front of the cinema and the 'ballroom structure' which is in a particularly poor condition.

Reinstallation of the rotunda window above the Cinema's central ticket booth is near completion with the windows and glazing having been installed; final work to re-roof is being undertaken.

Some of the LED bulbs on the illuminated Dreamland sign have unfortunately failed since the sign was first lit up in December last year. Although LED replacement lamps do provide lower running costs and longer life cycles, if they do fail, this usually happens fairly soon after they are installed. Some bulbs have failed and the manufacturers are aware of this problem and offer a one year guarantee. The bulbs have now been replaced at no extra cost by the council's contractor.

***Nick Laister***

Chairman, The Dreamland Trust

Jan Leandro (Audience Development Officer)

[www.dreamlandmargate.com](http://www.dreamlandmargate.com)

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# **Wanted, A Few Useful People for the Ghost Business:**

## **The Story of Victorian Showman Randall Williams**

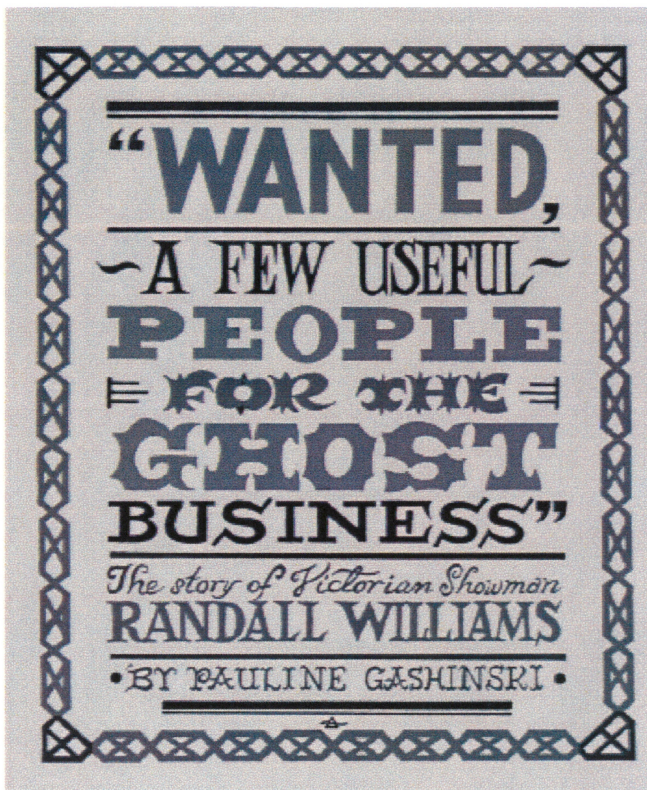
**by Pauline Gashinski**

Randall Williams was born in Liverpool in 1846. His career as a showman began with a small magic act, but he was soon doing well enough that in 1873 (when he was just 27) he was able to start his own ghost illusion show. That was a type of stage show that combined theatrical representations with the optical effect known as 'Pepper's Ghost.'

Randall toured with his 'Great Ghost Show' for more than 25 years. It was part ghost illusion theatre, part variety show, and was just the type of light entertainment that appealed to working class audiences. Randall was also one of the first travelling showmen to exhibit films in his show. The highlight of his career, however, was when he was invited by the famous showman-entrepreneur, Imre Kiralfy, to exhibit his show at the Victorian Era Exhibition at Earl's Court in London in the summer of 1897. Randall's "original Pepper's Ghost" thrilled audiences the entire summer and led to him becoming known as 'The King of Showmen.'

Randall spent his entire life 'on the road' and was one of the travelling show community's most outspoken activists. He was one of a small group of showmen who met in Salford in late 1890 to organize a protest against the Moveable Dwellings Bill. The bill was introduced by child welfare reformer, George Smith, and was aimed at regulating and controlling the gypsy population. However, had it passed, it would have had dire consequences for all those whose livelihoods depended on a travelling lifestyle. The story of the showmen's fight with Smith over the bill, and how it led to the founding of the Van Dwellers Protection Association (the present day Showmen's Guild of Great Britain) at a meeting in George's Sanger's Amphitheatre in London in 1891 has never been told before.

Randall's story is told against a backdrop of hundreds of contemporary newspaper articles and advertisements spanning the period from the early 1870s to the late 1890s. The various news sources provided a unique glimpse at the culture of the travelling show community during the late Victorian period. Anyone with an interest in the history of travelling shows, ghost illusion shows, early film exhibitions, working class entertainment, and 'life on the road' during Victorian times will find this book appealing. It will also be of interest to anyone whose ancestors made a living in the fairground and travelling amusement trade in Britain (includes sections on the Monte and Williams showmen).



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# “Shock!” She Wrote

By John Peterson

Who among us does not love a good mystery? If that's you, then put on your thinking cap, for today's story is a puzzler.

As I have pointed out over the years, the makers of British games seldom put their imprimatur on their product. The reasons varied but the two most reasonable explanations were a desire to escape the long arm of the law when gambling came under fire from the local authorities and the small batch output of many manufacturers. The unintended consequence of this practice is that half a century or more later, attribution is difficult in some cases and impossible in others.

Another charming factor that sometimes enters into play was the propensity of operators to modify their equipment over time to either make it appear fresh for the players or to fool the constabulary into thinking what they were looking at was not really what it seemed to be. All of these elements are present today as we examine my latest acquisition.

The machine pictured opposite is another sterling example of a game gussied up in Showman's paint. We've talked previously about this practice by fun fair operators adding these appealing paint schemes to older games in an attempt to spruce up the machine and attract players. I must confess, I love this naive carnival art form. The scrolls, fleurs de lis and flourishes are remarkably similar among the painted games that I own. Were there many artists copying each other or were there only a few practising this art? I challenge my British brethren to look into this area and come up with new information. Please!

Those of you who have more than a passing knowledge of foreign (as in non-American) games are already shouting: “This is not a puzzler; this is a Bajazzo!” And you would be right. This game started life as a clown catcher, also known by the original French clown designation: *Bajazzo*. Bajazzos were made in France, Germany and England. Just as a side note, the American company Arcade Supply Company had a brief and unsuccessful run with their version called ‘The Clown’.

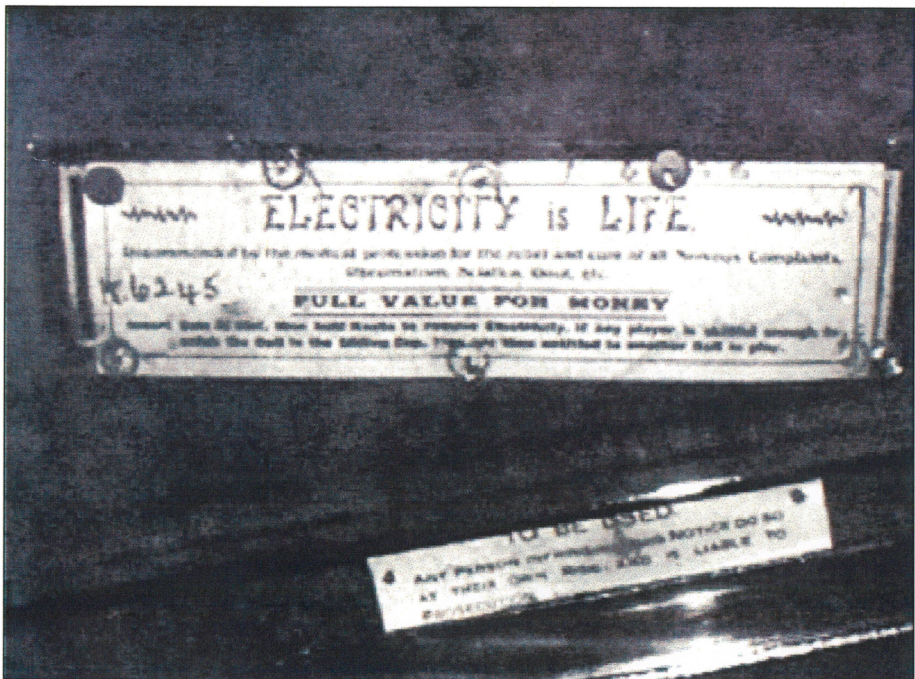
This particular Bajazzo was manufactured by the British company Pressers, Moody, Wraith & Gurr Ltd. of London in the 1920s. I am certain of this because on the left outside panel of the game stamped into the wood are the initials: P.M.W.G. Case closed? No, case just warming up.

**Opposite**, John's new Clown Catcher, which later in his text he refers to as the 'yellow' game. The door is painted yellow, but of course, shown here in b&w.

The Bajazzos originally had a clown figure as the catcher (see front cover picture). You can clearly see that this game has a shield rather than the traditional clown. Additionally, the usual placard behind the clown reads: *"Put penny in slot, turn handle on right until Ball falls from Top hole. Endeavour to catch Ball in Clown's hat by moving Knob on left. If successful bell will ring and a Check be delivered automatically and Ball returns for play."* This same instruction card is attached to my game playfield but you cannot see it because it is covered over with a different card, (pictured below).

If this were not confusing enough, on the opposite side of the game from the P.M.W.G. stamp, "SAMC 219" is stamped into the wood case. Further exacerbating paternity are two ink stamps inside the game. Both of these say "Automatic Slot Amusement Supply." All that's missing is the ubiquitous pen and ink "Kilroy was here" and someone's initials carved with a penknife. Clearly, this lovely courtesan has worked for more than one master in her chequered past. Let's see if we can sort things out.

This game is almost identical to another Pressers clown game that I own, (pictured opposite). Ironically, both games have Showman's paint. The blue game playfield hardware is chrome; the yellow game has brass. Clearly, this yellow game originated from the Pessers's factory. It originally dispensed a token or 'check' to be redeemed by the operator after a successful catch of the ball by the player.





After spending time as a normal Bajazzo, this game came into the possession of SAMC, the Streets Automatic Machine Company. Like many British coin-op companies, Streets had multiple permutations from start to finish. Originally founded as Harry Streets & Sons in the 1920s, they became Streets Automatic Machine Company in 1933. Suspended during World War II, they continued in some fashion into the 1970's, evolving from table games early on to importing American pinball to finally kiddie rides and music systems.

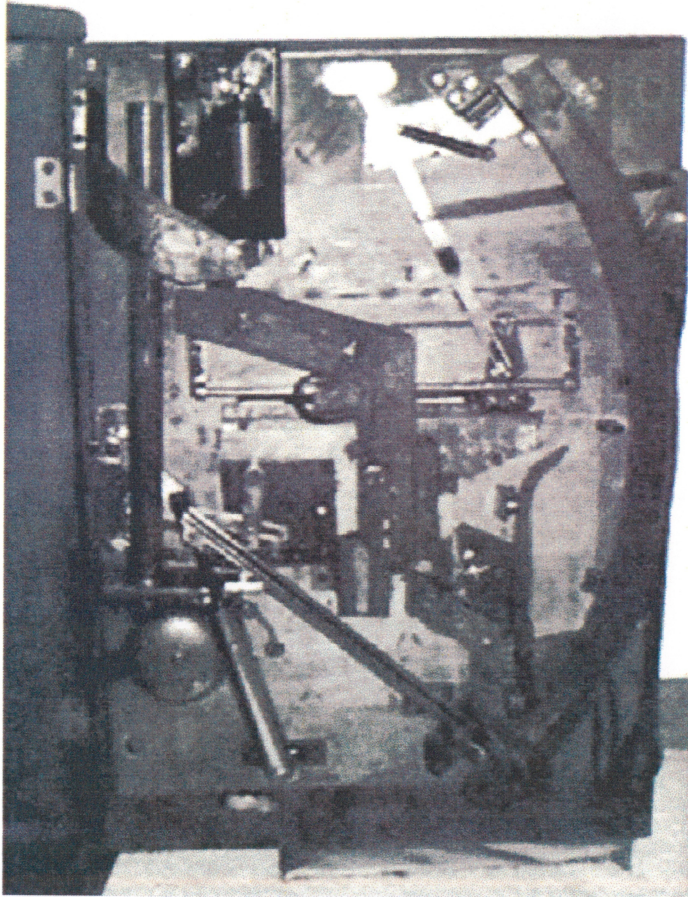


*Above, John's other Clown Catcher, the 'blue' game.*

**Opposite page,** *the replacement instruction card on John's 'yellow' catcher promises "full value for money".*



Somewhere between Pressers and me, the game also fell into ownership of Automatic Slot Amusement Supply. I can find no reference to this company in any of my materials. As noted, they ink stamped the interior of the game, twice, so they were either an operator or possibly a middleman. I am positing that Streets most likely was responsible for adding the shocker feature to this catcher and turning the game from one that paid out, into one that was strictly 'Amusement Only.' I base this on the fact that no reference to Automatic Slot is extant today, while Streets Automatic is fairly well documented as having a robust trade in their own games as well as games produced by other companies. The conversion was professionally done thus supporting the conclusion that a well established firm was responsible for the game's evolution.



*The mechanism of John's shocker catcher. Note the induction coil at the top left, above the coin chute. The mechanism otherwise remains unchanged.*

The function of the game now is straightforward. Upon deposit of a 1D (old) British penny, a circuit is completed and the two handles on the front of the game are 'hot.' After refreshing yourself with a jolt or two of as much 'life' as you can tolerate, you raise the ball to the top of the playfield by way of the 'T' handle on the right. Doing so breaks the electrical loop circuit and shuts off the shocker mechanism. You can see that the 'Electricity is Life' card blocks out the original card that promised a 'check' for a successful catch of the ball. Now, catching the ball delivers only a ring of the bell and a return of the ball for another go. To receive another electrical poke, you have to deposit another penny. There was no need to modify the original pay out mechanism of the game; the operator just left the internal token payout tube empty. Once a gambler, the game is now strictly an amusement device. This conversion is further emphasized by the replacement of the clown with a generic shield. Goodbye Mr. Bajazzo; hello Suzie Shock-Your-Shorts.

This game came up recently for sale on US Ebay. It was advertised as a shocker, which it is by way of modification. It was also priced as one of the rarer early American shockers, which it is not. The starting price was too high and the auction attracted no bidders. As I will do most of the time, I contacted the sellers during the active stage of the auction and offered them the correct information regarding the manufacture of their game. After the auction ended with no takers, we were able to agree upon a satisfactory price and I became the newest proud owner of this delightful piece of British arcade history. I asked the sellers how they arrived at the very high starting price for the machine. Their reply: "We asked a collector. He gave us the price, saying he had never seen one of these before."

I'll skip the editorial comment other than to say that if you're trying to sell something and your 'expert' admits he or she has no idea what you have, start with a low opening price. The market will ultimately tell you the true value. That is solid advice, normally. My next story, 'The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly,' will illuminate this recommendation and turn it on its head.

But that's for another day. Mystery solved? I think so. Shocked? Definitely! If you want to shock me, I can be reached at: [jp4@charter.net](mailto:jp4@charter.net). Until next time, good hunting.

***John Peterson, USA***







# Inside Tuckshop

By Robert Rowland

Just recently, I've had a few slot collectors asking that if I ever decided to sell my Tuck Shop, would I keep them in mind. This probably won't happen, as my personal memories of this machine in the 1960s are happy ones.

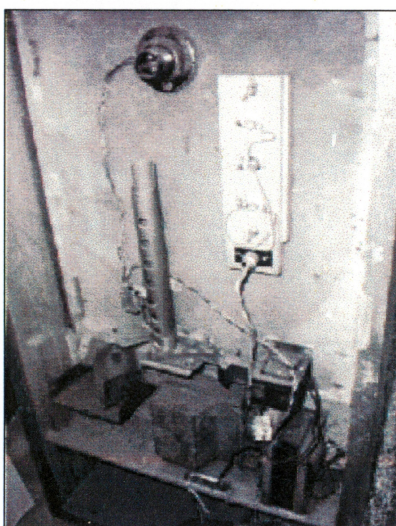
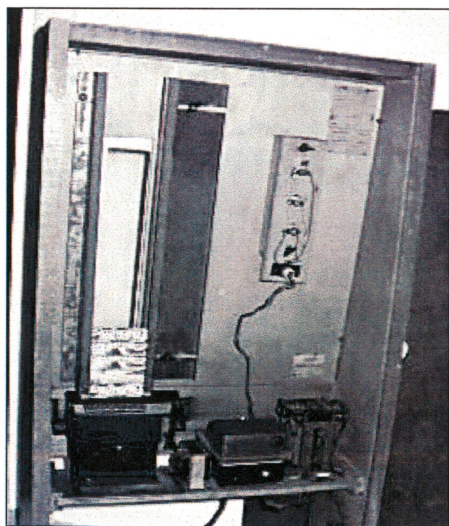
Tuck Shop was produced in the 1960s by Shields of Bridlington. It is a small pinball type machine, measuring just 17" x 32" x 33" high. Although it is a fairly rare machine now, Shields also produced an even rarer football themed version called Shoot, which apart from the theme, is identical to Tuck Shop.



Here in Mablethorpe in the mid '60s, Marine Pastimes had a row of five Tuck Shops, four of them paying a win in Polos (fruit and mint Polos) and the other one paying out a thre'penny bit (a small mention about these can be found in MMM Issue 35, May 2009). As kids, there was a big attraction towards this row of Tuck Shops; maybe it was being able to see the tubes of Polos all lined up inside these machines, waiting to be won. Hopefully, your initial one penny play would be successful and you would have the thrill of seeing that winning tube of Polos rolling down the glass towards you. From memory, I recall that by around 4pm most days, the Polos in each of those machines in Marine Pastimes were getting low, despite having been filled up to the top every morning before the arcade opened its doors, proving that Tuck Shop machines were popular with the punters.

With all these memories flooding back, I decided to take a closer look inside my Tuck Shop, and I came up with some interesting findings. Firstly, the selector unit that changes the traffic lights each time the ball touches the sides or bumpers has sixty positions. However, it doesn't work exactly in sequence as the traffic lights you see in the road. On Tuck Shop's selector, there are 30 orange, 20 red and only 10 (winning) green – that's a one in six chance of finishing on green and winning. There is a long losing sequence of seven, after one of the green wins: Or, Red, Or, Red, Or, Red, Or, then green. That is then followed by the shortest losing sequence of three: Or, Red, Or, then green.

One other thing I noticed was that the sweetie holder at the back of the machine is adjustable. I may be wrong, but were the tubes of Polos inside these machines the exact same size as those sold in the sweet shops for 3d? It's possible that these Tuck Shop machines vended slightly smaller tubes of Polos. If anyone out there can confirm this, then do please let us know.



Moving on to 1971, when decimalisation arrived, Marine's five Tuck Shops were reduced to only three. They were converted to one new pence per play, and finishing on a green light won you a two-pence coin. For some reason, this new format didn't seem to catch on and within three more summer seasons, Mablethorpe became Tuck Shop-free. At the time, I was really sad to see them go, although I probably helped their demise by not playing on them at all. Ask anyone today, most collectors prefer them paying out sweets rather than a coin.

I bought my Tuck Shop from John Hanson in Hull. Upon meeting and collecting the machine, I also purchased various back issues of Penny Arcadia magazine, which John had published. Looking through some of those magazines, it became clear that John had tried for a while to sell this Tuck Shop machine. In Issue 17 there was a full-page ad. with a picture, which read: *'A machine that rarely seems for sale. When I acquired this machine years ago, it cost me then a Mills Film Stars, a BMCo Digger complete with top flash and a Jennings bandit with the flat silver badge on.'* I was really pleased to get hold of this Tuck Shop, because it was the first one I had ever seen for sale in over thirty years.

I have filmed a clip of my Tuck Shop for Youtube. Search for: 'Penny Arcade Machine 1960s Tuck-Shop' and you can enjoy a clip of film showing me desperately trying to win a tube of Polos. This is one machine that I would be very reluctant to part with, as the 1960s memories of this machine are so great.

In the next issue of the magazine, I will take a look at my latest slot; an electro-mechanical wall machine called Greyhound Stadium. See you all next month.

**Robert Rowland**

## Editor's Note

Maybe my memory is fading with old age, but I'm sure I have seen at some time in the past, a version of Tuck Shop called 'Traffic Lights'. Can anyone confirm this?

**Opposite page, Left,** a view of the interior of the Tuck Shop back-box, showing the adjustable sweet magazine. **Right,** the coin payout version.





# More Mystery Machines

By Brian King

Back in Issue 16 of MMM you may recall I set you all a challenge of trying to identify a couple of machines, one that I have in my collection and one I came across whilst on holiday, at an event in Australia. Well with reference to the first one, a working model called Kitty's Bedtime, no-one came up with any information whatsoever, so I think we can rightly assume that this was a home-made 'one off' machine.

On the other hand, the second machine I featured, which was found in Australia, a letter stamper by The British Automatic Company Ltd, really set the ball rolling with a wealth of material coming in from around the world. So much information came in, resulting in the company being featured heavily in our magazine for several issues. Therefore with such a positive result ensuing I thought I would set you a similar challenge with another couple of 'Mystery Machines'.

## Mystery Machine No 3 – Joking Joey

Joking Joey came to my attention last year when it came up for sale on Ebay, owned then by a gentleman in Somerset I believe. Well as luck would have it, he came up for sale a few weeks ago in Staffordshire and being something totally different I bought it. It is a six foot working model of a moving ventriloquist /funny man/drun kard who tells jokes in a voice of Jimmy Cricket.

By inserting £1 in the slot Joey will tell you jokes for five minutes as he moves about and staggers around the lamp post which lights up giving an evening effect. His mouth and eyes move up and down plus a little mouse pops his head out of a trap door. The workings actually seem quite crude, as the main mechanism for creating movement is a redundant talking/moving stags head base. The head has been removed and the strings, which move Joey, are operated from the mechanics in the base of the stag's head.

I would estimate that this working model has probably been built independently during the last ten years or so but as I don't have any information at all about it I'm throwing it open to you the members. Do any of you out there know who built it and do you know of any more in existence or any other details etc?



## Mystery Machine No 4 – Fortune Teller

A few years ago whilst walking around the antique stalls at the Great Dorset Steam Fair, I came across what appears to be the top half of a floor standing Fortune Teller. The tableau of the gypsy is beautifully made, very life-like and is very decorative with crystal ball etc. The wooden frame has octagonal columns and is made from a dark wood, possibly mahogany. I would estimate that it probably dates from the 1930's.

The mystery to me is that it has glass on three sides but the frames holding the glass are not very substantial at all and I certainly wouldn't want to have this on public display. So, does anyone out there recognise it or the machine it would have been part of? If you do, please write in and share your information with us all. Since I purchased the gypsy I have been on the lookout for a suitable floor-standing unit to put her in, so please see my advert opposite.

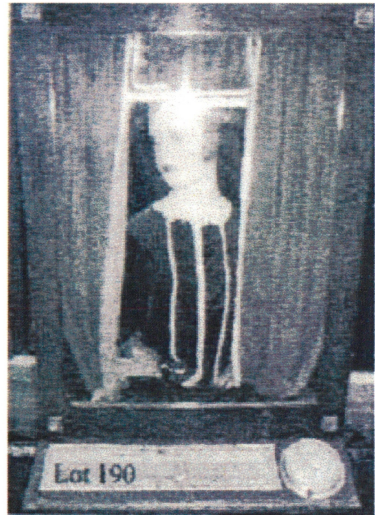
*Brian King*



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# **Mechanical Memories Magazine**

## **Binders Update**

Thanks to all of you who have responded to my suggestion of getting binders produced for our magazines. To date, I have received pledges to purchase approximately forty binders. This is still a little short of my original target of fifty, which will be required as a minimum order. However, if fifty were produced they would fly off the shelf immediately giving no leeway for others to purchase binders at a later date when they realise what they are missing! So with this in mind I would like to receive pledges for around seventy binders in order to place an order for one hundred, thus allowing me to have stock on hand for all. Therefore my plea goes out once again to all out there who are sitting on the fence. If you would like binders for your lovely colourful MMMags, please give me a ring or an e-mail and let me know how many binders you think you would be willing to purchase. Come on, make my day, be brave and help double the pledges to-date. Looking forward to hearing from you.

***Brian King***

Tel; 01347 811532

e-mail, [Brian.P.King@btinternet.com](mailto:Brian.P.King@btinternet.com)



# Book Shop



## **Collector's Guide to Vintage Coin Machines** (2nd edition with revised priceguide) by Dick Bueschel.

Chapters on scales, vending, arcade, slots, jukes, pins and stimulators. Attractive book, well researched and illustrated, featuring 700 machines all in colour.

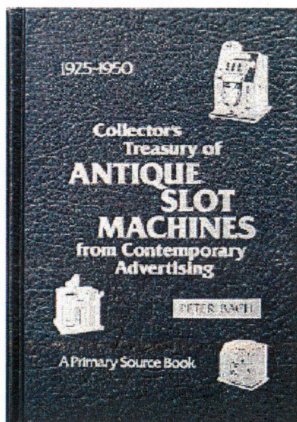
Hardback, 220 pages. **Price: £32.40**



## **Vintage Trade Stimulators and Counter Games** by Dick Bueschel.

Detailed descriptions of the machines, dates, manufacturer production data, plus over 800 pictures, a price guide and a wealth of historical context, will make you an instant expert on these previously under-represented coin-ops.

Hardback, 264 pages, 792 colour photos. **Price: £29.50**



## **Collector's Treasury of Antique Slot Machines from Contemporary Advertising (1925-1950)** by Peter Bach.

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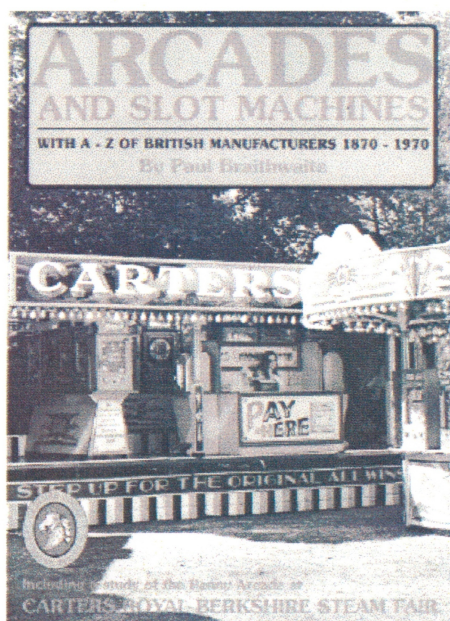
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